

OFFICE OF SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION
STATE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION COMMISSION

DECEMBER 3, 2009
10:30 AM

HARRY B. NELSON MEMORIAL BUILDING,
LSU CAMPUS (ACROSS FROM THE JOHN PARKER COLISEUM)
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

PROCEEDINGS/MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

The regular monthly Commission meeting was called to order by Vice Chairman Fletcher at 10:30 A.M.

ROLL CALL

The roll was called by Joey Breaux.

Members present: Vice Chairman Randell Fletcher, Ernest Girouard, Ed Yerger, Garland Colvin, John Compton and Dr. Paul Coreil

Members absent: Chairman George Guillory

A quorum was present.

Others present: Kevin Norton, NRCS; Dwight Landreneau, LSU; Brad Spicer, LDAF and Joey Breaux, LDAF

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Vice Chairman Fletcher called for a motion to approve the minutes of the October 27, 2009 State Commission meeting.

Motion: Dr. Girouard made a motion to approve the minutes from the October 27, 2009 Commission meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Colvin and passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Vice Chairman Fletcher said they would next take up Unfinished Business and requested Mr. Spicer to report on the items listed on the agenda.

SWCD Farm Bill Implementation Report

Mr. Spicer said that he continues to track districts' progress on the earning of Farm Bill funds. He said he has made distribution of the \$90,000 that the NRCS State Conservationist Mr. Norton recently made available. Mr. Spicer said, as directed by the State Commission, the funds were for the most part allocated as per district Farm Bill workload percentages that was determined from NRCS Farm Bill records. He said districts that had not earned over 25% of their original allocation did not receive any additional funds.

District Audits

Mr. Spicer said that to his knowledge all districts will have their audits or compilations turned into the Legislative Auditor's Office by the December 31, 2009 deadline. He said he will follow-up with Mr. Tate to see if there are any districts that can not meet the deadline.

State Commission D&O, Workers Comp and Hired/Non-Hired Auto Insurance

Vice Chairman Fletcher said the next agenda item is the State Commission's three insurance policies and asked Mr. Spicer to give the update on them. Mr. Spicer said that the Office of Soil and Water Conservation only received one bid for the three insurance policies and that Turrentine Insurance Agency was selected to provide the three policies. He said that this action was as per the State Commission's instructions at their October meeting.

LACD Annual Meeting

Mr. Spicer said plans for the meeting are on schedule and that most of the invited speakers have accepted their invitations to speak at the meeting. Dr. Girouard said that some of the meeting highlights include very informative concurrent breakout sessions on Thursday afternoon and a very important legislative session on Friday morning. He said that again this year, a Master Farmer Recognition Luncheon will be held on Thursday the 14th, and the Awards Dinner will follow a hosted social on Thursday evening. Dr. Girouard said the Crowne Plaza Hotel is an excellent facility and that the staff is very accommodating. He said he is looking forward to having an informative and enjoyable meeting. He said because of the serious issues such as proposed cuts in district funding and restructuring of State government, that it is critical every SWCD in the state have supervisors attend the meeting.

Mr. Spicer said as discussed at earlier State Commission meetings, there are no plans to have a supervisors training session in conjunction with the LACD Annual meeting. He said Mr. Breaux would cover this subject later in the meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

NRCS State Conservationist Report

Mr. Norton handed out copies of his printed report and pointed out that this periodical update has a new format, and also that NRCS Louisiana has a new Public Affairs Specialist, Ms. Holly Martien, who came back to NRCS from Rural Development.

Mr. Norton said Mr. Harris Sherman, NRCS Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment (USDA oversight of NRCS and Forest Service) was in Louisiana recently and was provided a tour of coastal areas in south Louisiana with some supervisors. Mr. Norton said a strong emphasis was made on the connectivity of the SWCDs and NRCS at the local level. Mr. Norton said Mr. Sherman enjoyed his visit to Louisiana and expects to return as soon as possible.

Mr. Norton said that the three watersheds for the Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) have been selected; they are the Mermentau, Bayou Macon and Boeuf River Watersheds. He said that his printed report also depicts a number of recent accomplishments from around the state, including the Capital RC&D's grant award for the purchase of three no-till grain drills, St. James Parish Ag Day's Fast Food Farm and many other SWCD outreach activities.

Mr. Norton said that he has a couple of retirements to announce; they are Mr. Ron Marcantel, Assistant State Conservationist/Operations, and Mr. Ed Giering, State Conservation Engineer. Mr. Norton said that both of these men have contributed many years of hard work to the NRCS and will be retiring at the end of the month. He said the vacancy announcement for Mr. Marcantel's position has been released, and hopefully that position will be filled soon, possibly by the next State Commission meeting. Mr. Norton said that Mr. Giering's vacant position will be announced next and will hopefully it will be filled by the first of the year.

Mr. Norton said that he recently attended the Minden City/Farm Prayer Breakfast and that it was a fine time where the community comes together for all the right reasons, and that the District is fairly prominent at the event. He said that it was a very enjoyable experience where the urban area population comes out in thanks and appreciation of the agricultural community. He discussed the RC&D's involvement with the EPA watershed plan development that is to be carried out through the efforts of the watershed coordinators employed by the RC&D Councils.

Mr. Norton also said that they received their appropriations and ran the figures, and will be able to maintain the Farm Bill support agreement with districts as was funded at the statewide level at the beginning of this past fiscal year, and as in the past, if extra funds became available, to possibly increase the funding.

Mr. Norton said this concluded his report.

Correspondence

Vice Chairman Fletcher asked Mr. Spicer to continue with the agenda items under Correspondence.

Mr. Spicer said the first item is a letter to Dr. Girouard from Dr. Harold Aymond with the Gulf Coast SWCD stating that he was resigning as Area IV Vice President. Mr. Spicer said in his letter, Dr. Aymond stated that for medical reasons he must reduce his level of activity in LACD. Dr. Girouard said that Mr. Jim Shipp has agreed to fill in for Dr. Aymond until the LACD January meeting.

Mr. Spicer said the next item on Section 1619 of the Farm Bill is for the Commission's information. He said the document provides an explanation of Section 1619 that prohibits the USDA Secretary and its employees from disclosing certain information that has been provided by landowners and producers who participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture programs except as necessary for delivering technical assistance. He said the same restrictions apply to district board members and district staff.

Mr. Spicer said the next item is an email from Boeuf River SWCD regarding retired district employees OGB-PPO health insurance. He said that he has talked to Mr. Fred Huenefeld about the health insurance cost to the Boeuf River SWCD. Mr. Spicer said that their district secretary was not insured through the district, so when she retired, the district had no obligation for her state health insurance premiums. Mr. Spicer said, however, she was covered by her husband's state insurance policy and the agency that he worked for was required to pay his and her premium when he retired. Mr. Spicer said the former secretary's husband recently died and upon his death, the Boeuf River SWCD, by law was required to pick-up the agency's share of her state health insurance premium. Mr. Spicer said this is another case where the district now has a long term financial obligation to pay health insurance premiums. He said that the only solution, in his opinion, is for the enactment of legislation that requires state funding be provided and set aside for all district health insurance cost obligations. Mr. Spicer said this is the only means of keeping districts from getting into insolvent funding situations. Mr. Spicer said that he proposed that the State Commission establish a committee to review the entire district health insurance program.

Mr. Spicer said the last item is a letter from the Crescent SWCD requesting authorization for three of their board members to attend the NACD Annual meeting in Orlando, Florida January 31 through February 3, 2010.

Motion: Mr. Compton made a motion to approve the district to reimburse the three Crescent SWCD board members to attend the NACD Annual meeting in Orlando, Florida January 31 through February 3, 2010. The motion was seconded by Mr. Colvin and passed unanimously.

Mr. Spicer asked if there were any questions and if not, that concluded correspondence.

Supervisor Resignations/Appointments and Reappointments

Vice Chairman Fletcher asked Mr. Breaux to report on the supervisor resignations and appointments. Mr. Breaux reported on the resignations of the following supervisors: Mr. Charles Richardson, appointed position, Capital SWCD; and Mr. John Compton, elected position, Capital SWCD.

Motion: Dr. Girouard made a motion to accept the resignations of supervisors Mr. Charles Richardson, appointed position, Capital SWCD; and Mr. John Compton, elected position, Capital SWCD. The motion was seconded by Mr. Colvin and passed unanimously.

Mr. Breaux said the respective conservation districts are requesting the State Commission to appoint the following supervisors to a new term in office:

Capital SWCD, Mr. John Compton to fill expired appointed position of Mr. Charles Richardson. Term will begin December 3, 2009 and will expire on November 23, 2012.

Capital SWCD, Mr. Jack Gober to fill vacant elected position of Mr. John Compton. Term will begin December 3, 2009 and will expire on June 30, 2010.

Red River SWCD, Mr. George Lormand to fill vacant elected position of Mr. Johnny Ray Norman. Term will begin December 3, 2009 and will expire on June 30, 2010.

Motion: Mr. Colvin made a motion to approve the appointments of supervisors. The motion was seconded by Mr. Yerger and passed unanimously.

Election of Commission Officers

Vice Chairman Fletcher said the next item is the election of the State Commission officers. He said the current Chairman, Mr. George Guillory and he, as Vice Chairman, have held their positions for the past two years. He said Mr. John Compton has held the Secretary/Treasurer position for more than two years. Vice Chairman Fletcher said that the floor was open for nominations for Chairman. Mr. Compton said he nominated Mr. Randell Fletcher for the Chairman's position. Vice Chairman Fletcher asked if there were any other nominations and there were none. The motion was seconded by Mr. Yerger and passed unanimously.

Vice Chairman Fletcher said that the floor was open for nominations for Vice Chairman. Mr. Yerger nominated Mr. John Compton. Mr. Compton said that he would decline the nomination for Vice Chairman. Mr. Compton nominated Mr. Edward Yerger as Vice Chairman. Vice Chairman Fletcher asked if there were any other nominations for Vice Chairman and there were none. The motion was seconded by Dr. Girouard and passed unanimously.

Vice Chairman Fletcher said that the floor was open for nominations for Secretary/Treasurer. Mr. Colvin nominated Mr. John Compton. Vice Chairman Fletcher asked if there were any other nominations and there were none. The motion was seconded by Dr. Girouard and passed unanimously.

Resolved, Mr. Randell Fletcher be elected Chairman of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission. The term will begin December 3, 2009 and end December 3, 2010.

Resolved, Mr. Edward Yerger be elected Vice-Chairman of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission. The term will begin December 3, 2009 and end December 3, 2010.

Resolved, Mr. John Compton be re-elected Secretary-Treasurer of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission. The term will begin December 3, 2009 and end December 3, 2010.

Chairman Fletcher thanked the State Commission on behalf of all the officers and asked Mr. Breaux to report on the next agenda item, the required Supervisors Training.

Supervisor's Training

Mr. Breaux said that two years ago the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission (SSWCC) made it mandatory for all supervisors to attend at least one SSWCC supervisors training in a two year period and that the only regularly scheduled trainings would be in conjunction with the LACD Annual Meeting. He said that this was written into the State Commission's PPM #13. Mr. Breaux said that there was a considerable divergence from the PPM last year in that attending two-hours of the LACD Standing Committee's break-out sessions at the LACD Annual meeting were permitted to qualify as meeting the training requirement. Also, he said that many supervisors seemed to appreciate the convenience of attending the trainings that were held this year in conjunction with each of the Area meetings, and that many also felt the attendance of breakout sessions did not serve well as an orientation or as continued training. Mr. Breaux said that if the State Commission wished to continue with having the trainings in association with the Area meetings, the PPM would need to be revised to reflect this.

Mr. Spicer recommended discontinuing allowing the breakout sessions at the LACD Annual Meeting to count as training, saying the original intent was two-fold: to provide training for the supervisors, and to increase LACD Annual Meeting attendance, and neither has been accomplished. He said that the training must focus entirely on the SWCD mission and authorities and Supervisor roles and responsibilities. He said to achieve these objects; he suggests separating the training sessions from the LACD Annual Meeting.

Dr. Girouard agreed, and said that the State Commission may want to consider using training modules, which is what other states are doing, but regardless of the design, supervisors need to be able to prove that they can manage SWCD operations.

Mr. Norton said that he noticed varying degrees of attendance at the trainings held with the Area meetings this year, but holding the meetings in the different areas or similar fashion may have merit as the groups are smaller, allowing for more interaction, and the supervisors present have more in common with each other than if it was a single statewide training. Mr. Norton said that he feels it is important to keep NRCS formally involved in these trainings, so that either he or one of the Area Conservationists may take part in delivering this training information.

Mr. Compton suggested that whatever is done, a new supervisor should be required to attend a training session within six months of appointment or election, and suggested that the State Commission receive recommendations for consideration at the January Commission meeting and make a firm decision there on the supervisors training requirements and schedule.

Motion: Mr. Compton made a motion to review recommendations by the OSWC and NRCS regarding the content, schedule and the delivery of the required supervisor training, and revise the PPMs accordingly at the January 2010 Commission meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Yerger and passed unanimously.

OTHER BUSINESS

Chairman Fletcher asked if there was any other business to come before the Commission and there was none.

NEXT MEETING

Chairman Fletcher said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for 10:30 AM Wednesday, January 13, 2010 in the Bayou/Levee Room at the Crown Plaza Hotel, 4728 Constitution Avenue, Baton Rouge Louisiana.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Chairman Fletcher asked if there was any other business or comments. None replied.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Fletcher said if there was no other business that he will accept a motion to adjourn.

Motion: Mr. Colvin made a motion to adjourn at 11:45 A.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Yerger and passed unanimously.

/s/ *Randell Fletcher*_____

Randell Fletcher, Chairman
State Soil and Water Conservation Commission